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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 000113

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DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INR/NESA; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

LONDON FOR POL/RIEDEL

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TAGS: PREL PGOV PTER CE JA NO IN LTTE

SUBJECT: Japan's Akashi reviews visit to Sri Lanka;
India said to be unhappy with emerging GoJ role

Refs: Colombo 101, and previous

(U) Classified by Charge d'Affaires Lewis Amselem.
Reasons 1.5 (b, d).

¶1. (C/NF) SUMMARY: In a January 17 meeting with the Ambassador, Japanese Special Envoy Akashi reviewed his visit to Sri Lanka, noting that President Kumaratunga had decided not to meet him. He said the donors' conference in Tokyo was set for June 9-10, and he invited Deputy Secretary Armitage to attend and for the U.S. to serve as co-chair. XXXXXXXXXXXX In separate conversations, however, GSL Minister Moragoda told us that he was hearing that the XXXXXXXXXXXX on board with Japan's emerging role. Akashi seems to be hitting the right notes, but there appears to be a GoI/GoJ disconnect re his involvement. END SUMMARY.

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Akashi Reviews Visit
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¶2. (C/NF) Ambassador Wills and DCM met January 17 with Yasushi Akashi, Japan's Special Envoy on Sri Lankan issues. Akashi related that his visit to Sri Lanka was proceeding relatively well, so far. (Note: Akashi visited Sri Lanka from January 15-19.) He had had good meetings with Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and Opposition leader Mahinda Rajapakse of the People's Alliance. He had also attended a meeting of the "Sub-Committee for Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs" in Kilinochchi in Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)-controlled northern Sri Lanka. (Note: Akashi is officially the "principal adviser" to this joint GSL-LTTE sub-committee.)

¶3. (C/NF) Akashi noted that President Kumaratunga, at the last moment, had cancelled her meeting with him, sending a "cordial" letter explaining that she had been engaged in another meeting. While he was not "upset" about it, the fact that the meeting did not take place was too bad, Akashi said. He had hoped to deliver a strong message to the president, requesting that she work to improve strained "cohabitation" relations with the PM. Foreign Minister Kawaguchi had delivered Kumaratunga such a message during her recent visit to Sri Lanka (see Reftels), he noted. Japan believed that if there was one issue that could undermine the peace process it was political problems in the south. Akashi noted that he planned to meet with a representative of the radical, Sinhalese extremist Janantha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) party and would use that meeting to underscore Japanese support for the peace process.

¶4. (C/NF) Ambassador Wills agreed that cohabitation and related problems in the south needed to be worked out in order for the peace process to continue to move forward. The issues involved were not intractable, but it would take a lot of concerted international pressure on actors in the south to reach the right result.

¶5. (C/NF) Queried about his recent discussions with LTTE senior negotiator Anton Balasingham, Akashi replied that the meeting, which was held in Bangkok after the recent talks there (see Reftels), had been very constructive. Balasingham had seemed "80 percent" sincere in his desire to see a negotiated end to the war. He also seemed agreeable to enhancing the priority given to human rights in the peace process, perhaps by announcement of a joint GSL-LTTE "charter" on the subject during subsequent peace talks with the GSL. The Ambassador noted that some of Balasingham's comments made in the course of the recent GSL-LTTE talks had been disturbing, including his reference in a BBC TV interview that the LTTE had no intention of disarming soon (see Reftels). Akashi said he had had the same impression. Nonetheless, Akashi allowed, Balasingham had indicated some give on the issue of the Sri Lankan

military's ""high security zones"" in Jaffna during their meeting. (Note: The LTTE has demanded a sharp reduction in the size of these zones. Also see Para 9 below.) The Ambassador noted that he had met with Defense Minister Marapana recently, who had also expressed confidence that the security zone issue could be dealt with. In any case, the Ambassador said, the presence of the Sri Lankan military in the north and east was a vital one in underscoring the unity of the country and as a deterrent to the LTTE.

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Donors' Conference and U.S. Involvement

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16. (C/NF) Switching gears, Akashi related that the international donors' conference for Sri Lanka was now scheduled to take place in Tokyo from June 9-10. Japan very much hoped that Deputy Secretary Armitage would be able to attend. As with the Norwegian government's efforts during the (November 2002) Oslo conference, the GoJ promised that it would choreograph the event to limit any possibility that U.S. participants would come into contact with the LTTE. Akashi added that the Japanese government would like the U.S. to serve as a co-chair of the conference, with the model being the Afghanistan reconstruction conference and its four co-chairs. Ambassador Wills replied that he appreciated this information and would pass it to Washington right away.

17. (C/NF) Queried for further details re the conference, Akashi responded that the GoJ was still developing its proposals and no target levels for development assistance from donors had yet been settled upon. The GoJ hoped that the conference would focus on the whole of Sri Lanka, and not only on the north and east, which seemed to be the World Bank's areas of focus. Akashi went on to add that the GoJ was planning on hosting the March 18-21 round of GSL-LTTE peace talks.

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Re India

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18. (C/NF) On the subject of the donors' conference, Akashi noted that Japan was hoping that India would also serve as a co-chair. He had raised this idea with the GoI during his recent visit to India. His interlocutors had been non-committal. National Security Adviser Mishra had noted, for example, that India's Sri Lanka policy was ""complicated"" by domestic politics, as well as legal restrictions prohibiting any interaction with the LTTE.

19. (C/NF) Re his own role, Akashi remarked that he had ""clarified"" to Indian interlocutors that his focus was on development-related issues. In response, the GoI had welcomed his efforts, asserting that Japanese involvement could only help the Sri Lankan situation. Akashi said he had promised to keep the Indians briefed on his efforts. While in New Delhi, Akashi commented that he had also met General (ret'd) Satish Nambiar, an Indian who was working on a report on the security zones in Jaffna. Akashi said he knew Nambiar and trusted him to come up with a fair-minded report. The Ambassador remarked that India was a critical regional player and could play a very important role in the Sri Lankan peace process. So far, the Indian government seemed a bit passive, although some officials such as Mishra reportedly wanted the GoI to assume a more activist stance.

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Moragoda's Comments re Akashi, Balasingham

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10. (C/NF) Contradicting Akashi in separate conversations with the Ambassador and DCM recently, key Sri Lankan Minister Milinda Moragoda told us that he was hearing that the GoI was not fully on board with Japan's expanding role. Moragoda said to the Ambassador that National Security Adviser Mishra had phoned him up after Akashi's visit to New Delhi and told him that the Indian government was not happy that the Japanese were becoming so heavily involved. Amplifying on these remarks in a subsequent conversation with the DCM, Moragoda said Mishra had told him that India did not want to serve as a ""co-chair"" at the June donors' conference. In general, the GoI felt that Akashi was too ""pushy"" and that he was too engaged in political aspects of the peace process. Moragoda indicated that he (Moragoda) also felt that the Japanese were a bit clumsy. Citing an example of this, he related that he been told that Akashi, in a meeting with Norwegian Embassy

representatives during his visit to Sri Lanka, had thanked the GoN for ""inviting"" Japan to help in the peace process. The Norwegians had told Moragoda they were stunned by this comment inasmuch as the GoN had never urged Japan to get involved: it had all been the GoJ's idea.

¶11. (C/NF) Regarding other aspects of the peace process, Moragoda said he had received news that Balasingham was quite ill and might not be able to participate in the next round of talks scheduled for February 7-10 in Thailand. Balasingham's health concerns seemed genuine and not a ruse to get out of the talks, Moragoda said. As he has on previous occasions (see Reftels), Moragoda added that he worried that Balasingham was so ill that he might be out of the picture soon. If that happened, it was not clear whom the LTTE might name to replace him as chief negotiator.

¶12. (C/NF) Re the February talks, Moragoda said they might take place at a lower-level if Balasingham could not make it. Other options included the GSL meeting with Balasingham in London, although this might mean that other LTTE delegation members might not be able to attend. (Note: Balasingham lives in London and is a British citizen. Other members of his LTTE peace talks' team, however, travel using Sri Lankan passports and would presumably be subject to British rules proscribing the LTTE if they tried to travel to London.) Moragoda said Balasingham might try to travel to the LTTE-controlled Wanni region at some point in February to consult with the LTTE leadership if his health, and health conditions there, allow it. (Note: The Wanni and Jaffna have been afflicted by an increase in incidence of dengue and typhoid of late.)

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COMMENT
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¶13. (C/NF) Akashi seems very well-informed and to be hitting the right notes re the peace process. Based on Moragoda's remarks, however, there seems to be a real disconnect between the Indians and Japan on his precise role, with the GoI feeling that Akashi is straying too far from a purely development-related role into political aspects of the process. Indeed, based on his conversation with us, Akashi does appear to be touching on territory that the Norwegian facilitators have been dealing with. We would hazard to guess that India could probably live with the current situation as long as the GoJ does not try to push the Norwegians out of the way. To his credit, there is no sign that Akashi wants to do that. Re Kumaratunga's cancellation of her meeting with Akashi, we do not want to jump to conclusions, but it could be another sign that the often cantankerous president is playing to anti-peace process elements. In what seemed to be a calculated move, she refused to meet with Norwegian Deputy Foreign Minister Helgesen during his last visit to Sri Lanka in late 2001, for example, and since that time has upped her criticism of the GoN role. END COMMENT.

¶14. (U) Minimize considered.

AMSELEM